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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001025

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CAIRO FOR POL - MAXSTADT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/11/2018

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: FORMER MOD DANJUMA ON ART. 98, BENUE AND REFORM

REF: A. ABUJA 205

[1](#)B. ABUJA 743

[1](#)C. ABUJA 989

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR HOWARD F. JETER; REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D)

[1](#)1. (S/NF) SUMMARY: June 7 DCM paid a farewell call on former Minister of Defense LTG (ret.) T.Y. Danjuma. Danjuma did not expect the GON to conclude an Article 98 agreement and doubted the Commission of Inquiry's report on the October 2001 Benue massacre would satisfy the U.S. Congress since the report failed to identify culpable individuals. Danjuma also expressed frustration with endemic corruption in the GON. END SUMMARY.

Article 98

[1](#)2. (S/NF) Former Defense Minister Danjuma (strictly protect) strongly doubted Nigeria would sign an Article 98 agreement. Reiterating what he had told us in prior meetings, Danjuma said that Nigeria would likely mirror South Africa's decision - a refusal to conclude an agreement. An inter-ministerial committee had met to develop a recommendation for President Obasanjo; the members were Danjuma, (former) Foreign Minister Sule Lamido, (former) Attorney General Kanu Agabi and another Minister who Danjuma could not recall. On the date of the meeting, Danjuma had been ill, so Agabi (chair) called to seek his views. Danjuma advised that Nigeria should stay in step with South Africa; he personally thought Article 98 agreements "would weaken the UN" and thus had reservations. He counseled again that the committee should learn why South Africa had declined to sign before making a final recommendation to President Obasanjo. Danjuma said Agabi voiced surprise since he expected Danjuma to be more positive about Article 98. He stated that the other three members had reached the same conclusion. Danjuma said that he believed a recommendation along these lines had already gone to Obasanjo.

[1](#)3. (S/NF) COMMENT: During a May 12 meeting with Ambassador Jeter (REF C), Danjuma made similar comments regarding Article 98. During that meeting, however, Danjuma said he would "try" to persuade Obasanjo to sign the agreement. By his own account, he did not make the effort. There remains a possibility that Nigeria could be encouraged to sign an Article 98, possibly as a "deliverable" should President Bush visit in the near future. However, (assuming Danjuma's account is accurate) in doing so, Obasanjo would have to disregard the advice of the committee he established on the subject, a move not unprecedented if Obasanjo holds his own strong counsel on an issue (e.g. The 2001 Racism Resolution). Obasanjo indicated he might do just that in a June 11 meeting with Ambassador (reported SEPTEL). END COMMENT.

Benue

[1](#)4. (C/NF) Turning to the October 2001 Benue incident, Danjuma said he doubted that Senator Feingold would be satisfied with the Commission of Inquiry's report (REF A). Danjuma had read the report cover-to-cover, and the Commission had not tried to identify responsible individuals. He commented that the military could convene a Board of Inquiry and easily determine those within the units who were responsible; the commander certainly knew which elements had gone into the area.

Defense Minister

15. (C) Danjuma said Salihu Ibrahim would not/not be the next Defense Minister; his successor would be a civilian, Danjuma predicted. Danjuma also offered that during his second Administration, President Obasanjo would assume much of the MOD's portfolio himself, possibly to the extent of becoming the de facto Minister. (COMMENT: Previous DAO reporting had indicated Salihu Ibrahim would be the next MOD (REF B). If a civilian, we predict that Lawal Batagarawa, former Minister of State for Defense (Army), would be the likely candidate. A northerner, Batagarawa has Obasanjo's confidence and worked ardently for the President's re-election. END COMMENT.)

Frustration with Corruption

16. (C) Danjuma said, "The last four years have been the most frustrating years of my life; there was no money." He opined that money was leaking from the system at every joint in the plumbing, most particularly from the Ministry of Finance and the CBN. His Ministry had caught three instances of double payment, and he thought the double payments were intentional and contrived with the support of Finance Ministry officials. If the same sort of thing was replicated elsewhere, the impact could be substantial. He said that corruption was particularly bad at the state level. He noted that roughly half the road-building projects in Nigeria were stalled and that a third or more of the local construction firms were either bankrupt or nearly so because they had taken high-interest loans to start projects for which they were not being paid.

Political Reform

17. (C) Danjuma said he had tried to present some thoughts, particularly on corruption and political reform, during his final meeting with Obasanjo as Defense Minister. But, he commented wryly, "the President is not a very good listener." Danjuma had, he said, broached several topics - the most important of which he thought was improving relations with the National Assembly -- but Obasanjo had not let him say very much before offering his own opinions. Danjuma said he hoped to get some more of his points across in the coming days.

COMMENT

18. (C) Danjuma is a close confidant of the President. His negative assessment of Article 98 and that of the others on the inter-ministerial committee tasked with examining the issue will influence Obasanjo's ultimate decision. However, in the past, Obasanjo has overruled his advisors on issues about which he felt strongly and, possibly, this could be one. Indications from the Ambassador's June 11 meeting with Obasanjo (SEPTEL) imply that Obasanjo may have already come to a different conclusion from his advisors. END COMMENT.
JETER